



BLACK PRAISE CONFERENCE REPORT

**African, Caribbean and Black Churches Responding to
HIV-related stigma in Ontario, Canada**

Report of a conference held on April 4th, 2019 in Toronto

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Prepared by:

David Lewis-Peart

For:

The Black PRAISE Research team -
Winston Husbands, Jelani Kerr,
Wangari Tharao, Liviana Calzavara,
Nicole Greenspan, Orville Browne,
Marvelous Muchenje-Marisa, Keresa Arnold

June 30, 2019

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Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all the pastors and congregants from the participating churches, staff and volunteers from the collaborating community-based agencies, and others who helped develop and evaluate the Black PRAISE intervention, and contributed to the success of the Black PRAISE conference. Thanks also to Henry Luyombya and Joanita Nakamwa for coordinating Black PRAISE and organizing the conference.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CBR 135610) and the CIHR Canadian HIV Trials Network (CTN 297) funded this research. Neither funder is responsible for the research design, data analysis or content of this report.



1. What this Report is About

This report summarizes proceedings from the Black PRAISE Conference held on Thursday, April 4, 2019 in Toronto, Ontario. The conference was attended by pastors and selected congregants from churches that participated in the Black PRAISE study, representatives from affiliated community-based organizations, research team members and other stakeholders working in Black faith institutions. Participants discussed their experience of Black PRAISE, other issues arising from the intervention, and possible next steps.

Black PRAISE was an initiative to develop and test an intervention to strengthen Black congregations' critical awareness of HIV affecting Black communities in Ontario, Canada. Specifically, the Black PRAISE team designed the intervention to increase congregants' knowledge about HIV affecting Black communities, reduce their level of HIV stigma.

2. Background to the Black PRAISE Conference

HOW BLACK PRAISE STARTED

In 2004-2006 the HIV Stigma Study explored the experiences of HIV stigma among African, Caribbean, Black (ACB) communities in Toronto. In a series of forums following the study, service providers and community members suggested a crucial role for Black faith communities and leaders in addressing stigma that was affecting ACB communities.

In 2011, the Social Research Centre in HIV Prevention and the African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO) jointly hosted a conversation on HIV stigma with Black faith leaders. Seed II Soil Consultants facilitated the meeting and Rev. Edwin Sanders of the Metropolitan Interdenominational Church (MIC) in Nashville, Tennessee delivered a keynote address based on his church's experience with its HIV ministry. Faith leaders in attendance participated in a series of knowledge sharing activities, and Seed II Soil developed a report with recommendations from the meeting. Participants agreed to collaborate on developing and implementing an intervention to reduce HIV stigma among Black congregations.

THE BLACK PRAISE STUDY

Black PRAISE (Pastors Raising Awareness and Insight of Stigma through Engagement) is a church-based intervention to engage Black congregations in strengthening critical awareness of HIV affecting Black communities in Ontario, Canada. Specifically, the intervention is intended to strengthen their knowledge of HIV

and reduce stigma. The research team piloted the intervention among six Black congregations in Toronto, Peel Region and Ottawa.

The project brought together a multi-disciplinary team of community stakeholders, researchers, service providers and faith leaders to develop and implement the intervention and a series of surveys among the congregations to evaluate its effectiveness.

The intervention consisted of three components: a booklet (*Wisdom is the Principal Thing*) with validated knowledge about HIV transmission, testing, the social determinants of health and other topics that the team distributed among all the congregations; a sermon (*A Place to Be Made Whole*) on compassion and social justice that the pastors delivered to their respective congregations, and a short film (*When it comes to stigma and being Black*) featuring first person perspectives on stigma that the congregations viewed. The three components addressed HIV knowledge and stigma in different ways and complemented each other. The team designed them to promote understanding and insight among the church congregations about HIV in Black communities in Ontario. The team delivered each component to the congregation on an agreed schedule from October to December 2016.

The team implemented three surveys among the congregations to assess possible improvements in their understanding of HIV, and possible reductions in stigmatizing beliefs and attitudes towards people living with HIV.

The surveys took place at baseline in October 2016 (i.e., prior to implementing the intervention), post-intervention in November/December 2016 following the intervention, and three months later in February/March 2017.

The study team comprised Dr. Winston Husbands (nominated principal investigator), Wangari Tharao and Dr. Liviana Calzavara (co-principal investigators), and co-investigators Dr. Jelani Kerr, Dr. Nicole Greenspan, Valérie Pierre-Pierre, Marvelous Muchenje-Marisa, and Dr. Orville Browne. Later, Keresa Arnold replaced Ms. Pierre-Pierre when she moved from ACCHO to the Ministry of Health. Henry Luyombya coordinated the study.

The collaborating agencies included: the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP), Africans in Partnership Against AIDS (APAA) and the Committee for Accessible AIDS Treatment (CAAT) in Toronto; Somerset West Community Health Centre in Ottawa; and Moyo Health and Community Services (formerly the Peel HIV AIDS Network). These agencies assisted with implementing the surveys in the churches on an agreed schedule.

The team also received support from church liaisons who were members of the respective congregations, and helped to coordinate the intervention activities and surveys among their congregations.

Congregants demonstrated increased knowledge of HIV and reduced levels of stigma after participating in the intervention. The reduction in stigma was most evident among those individuals with the highest level of stigma and those who were exposed to all three components of the intervention.

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF THE CONFERENCE

The Black PRAISE study team convened the pastors, congregants and collaborators involved in the development and implementation of Black PRAISE for a half-day conference. The purpose of the conference was to share the results from the pilot of the intervention, discuss the stakeholders' experiences with the project, and solicit feedback on next steps and potential areas for improvement.

The Black PRAISE Conference took place on April 4, 2019, 12.00pm-4.00pm, at the Ramada Plaza Hotel in downtown Toronto (see the conference agenda in Appendix 1). Attendees included pastors and congregants from the participating churches, members of the research team, staff and volunteers from the collaborating agencies, and the coordinators from related ACB HIV research initiatives.

In all, 44 people attended the conference, with 22 of those being pastors and church members who contributed to designing and piloting Black PRAISE.

David Lewis, an independent consultant, facilitated the conference and assisted the research team in coordinating the activities of the day.

Two note takers from the ACB community helped to capture the entirety of the day's activities. The project coordinator later sent attendees a link to conference evaluation questionnaire to share their experiences of the conference and Black PRAISE generally. The responses from conference attendees have been included in the conference evaluation summary (Appendix 2).

3. Conference Activities

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Attendees registered for the conference as they arrived. Dr. Orville Browne, a pastor and member of the research team, led the group in an opening intention/interfaith prayer. The facilitator reviewed the agenda with attendees, and asked them to introduce themselves to the group, identifying their affiliation and respective regions. The session then broke for lunch and informal networking.

BLACK PRAISE IMPLEMENTATION

After lunch, Winston Husbands (the project leader) presented an overview of Black PRAISE and the results of the research. Dr. Husbands began by introducing the members of the research team present in the room, and acknowledging individuals who had been instrumental in the development of the intervention and study. He also noted the continued involvement of Pastor Olufiayo Akinkunmi who had been a key stakeholder since the initial discussions about the project.

During his presentation, Dr. Husbands opened with the project background and the development process of the study, outlining the ways in which Black PRAISE emerged organically upon previous stigma research and other work in the province and the city of Toronto. Dr. Husbands shared the findings from Black PRAISE and highlighted some of the promising findings. Consequent to their exposure to the intervention: (a) congregants significantly increased their understanding of HIV, and retained their increased understanding up to

three months post intervention; (b) stigma decreased significantly among congregants who recorded high levels of stigma prior to the intervention; and (c) stigma decreased significantly among congregants who were exposed to all three intervention components, compared to those who were exposed to just one or two components.

Dr. Husbands noted that interventions such as Black PRAISE do not directly address the factors that systemically produce stigma and discrimination, such as social class, sexuality, internalized racism, and so on. Black PRAISE helps to create an environment for addressing the systemic and structural issues but do not address those issues directly.

Dr. Husbands offered that part of what determines the success of an intervention like Black PRAISE is in the 'how' or context of the information delivery, as opposed to simply the 'what', or the content. The utilization of and collaboration with faith leaders, the tailoring of the material, including relevant Biblical scripture, made the integration of the information more likely for participants as they have a familiar frame of reference and a trusted source.

Dr. Husbands ended his presentation with a reminder on the importance of education about HIV and stigma reduction within ACB communities and ACB communities of faith, and the need to make clear the relevance of this issue for Black participants given the significant impacts of HIV on Black populations in Canada.

DISCUSSION

Following the presentation by Dr. Husbands, there was an open discussion among the faith leaders and other attendees. The main points are grouped thematically and summarized as follows:

Challenging conversations

Many attendees expressed their appreciation to the study team and for Black PRAISE, seeing the study as having provided an opportunity for continued learning for their congregations, opening up much needed conversations in the church community, and doing so beyond just the boundaries of central Toronto.

Attendees shared that while the study was a great entry into conversations about stigma, there were questions about how faith communities can continue conversations to include issues such as sexuality and the LGBTQ community. One faith leader and a representative from a community agency were concerned that the method of addressing HIV stigma without naming the challenge around sexuality limited the scope of the work.

Representation and engagement

There was a question raised about overrepresentation of female congregants in the study and how there might be more intentionality around engaging men within the churches in these conversations. In response to this question, it was expressed by a member of a partner study, weSpeak, that this imbalance was likely due to the overall representation of women in church spaces in general, while also highlighting the ongoing challenge in HIV related work in general, in engaging men in conversations about sexual health and related issues.



An attendee inquired whether, given the success of the Black PRAISE model at effectively impacting congregations primarily composed of those of African and Caribbean descent, there was room to expand the work of Black PRAISE beyond Canada and into the Caribbean where HIV/AIDS is a more pressing a concern. Dr. Husbands shared that there were some informal conversations had with someone from a local university to potentially explore the transplantation of Black PRAISE to the Caribbean, but that those conversations had not materialized in any particular actions. Another attendee expressed a desire for Black PRAISE to be introduced to other Canadian cities such as Edmonton, which this individual noted has seen increasing numbers of Black peoples, particularly of African-descent now residing there.

A member of an affiliated community agency noted that given the success of the pilot, there was a need for steps to be taken to make adaptations to the model to include Muslim communities and Black communities not affiliated with any faith group. This more faith inclusive focus, the individual stated, was something that in the original development discussions had been intended with the work but would require some specific adjustments to function in the context of Islamic faith communities. Dr. Husbands agreed with the observation and recommendation.

Incentivization

A faith leader asked questions regarding the use of incentives and whether this may impact study findings in any way. Dr. Husbands clarified that the use of incentives was standard practice in the research world, and that an ethics board would be likely to flag a study if there was no compensation given. He emphasized, however, that compensation for time must not be so large as to appear coercive, but rather simply a monetary acknowledgement of the time taken out of one's day to participate. Other faith leaders in the room shared that they found the use of financial incentives demonstrated to study participants the value of their thoughts and opinions and encouraged more congregants to take part and see their contribution as worthwhile.

CHURCHES AND COLLABORATING AGENCIES SHARE EXPERIENCES

The six church communities were represented at the conference by members of the church leadership. Each community designated a representative to provide a brief report back on successes and challenges of the implementation and evaluation of Black PRAISE specific to their church. Their observations are as follows:

Church #1 (GTA)

The experience for this church was overall a positive one. The use of project liaisons from the congregation was an effective way to engage this church congregation and ensure buy-in and trust. Some congregants had inquired about donating their honorarium back to the church.

The intervention booklet was very popular, as evidenced by continued requests for it by congregants who shared it with others outside of the church.

The video appeared to connect with the younger members of the congregation more so than the other intervention materials. And while sermons were seen as helpful for some, congregants advised that perhaps some information may get lost for congregants through this delivery method.

While the intervention was well received, there was a question about what makes Black PRAISE unique to the ACB community and about possible differences for other ethnic and religious groups.

Church #2 (GTA)

The experience for this church was seen as successful. The project allowed for a much needed conversation on this issue of stigma. They found an increased confidence in being able to have those conversations effectively within the church.

The use of financial incentives was helpful and built on the effective promotion of the study within the church.

The video was seen as emotionally engaging and relatable. That said, it was found that the most impactful component of Black PRAISE for this church community was the sermon guide, which was used by the pastor to challenge his congregation around their ethic of love, framing it as a call to action for believers to love others the way that they are loved by Christ. The pastor also drew on the Biblical message contained in Hosea 4:6, about the importance of wisdom, and people perishing for the lack of knowledge. This message appeared to resonate for the congregants.

This church found that the pastor's attitude and knowledge determined the efficacy of the intervention but that there needed to be knowledge exchange and strengthened partnerships to ensure

that as things change within a church environment there is durability and continuity. This church community did note however, that what was absent were discussions about different sexualities and an emphasis on youth. There was also some need for clarity around mother-to-child transmission and stigma towards HIV positive women who are unable to breastfeed as a result.

Church #3 (Ottawa)

This church reported that Black PRAISE was well received. They noted that the branding of the intervention connected well with congregants and gave them the sense that the intervention was not solely a secular misappropriation, but rather ideologically in line with their beliefs as Christians. This was further aided by the role of the liaisons who worked to build that trust.

The choice of intervention tools, and the use of visually appealing and engaging materials, taking into account the different learning styles in the congregation was also helpful for this church community.

This church was also involved in the work being done through ACCHO and its It Takes Courage campaign. The subject matter blended well with Black PRAISE and they found the call to action in the 'It Takes Courage' motto helpful for the leadership in being able to respond to the issue of HIV stigma and begin challenging conversations.

That said, there is a need to discuss LGBTQ inclusion in relation to HIV related stigma. There was a request from this community for other means of delivering the surveys as some members of the congregation may not be as comfortable writing.

Church #4 (GTA)

Overall, there was a positive and progressive reception of Black PRAISE by this church community. However, many congregants already have a background in social services and healthcare, which means that the knowledge base around HIV within the church is relatively high. In addition, the pastor of this church community is quite sensitive and already quite active regarding social issues; consequently, the awareness aspect of the study and intervention was helpful in extending the conversation, breaking down ignorance and improving the wellbeing of those living with HIV/AIDS.

Church #5 (GTA)

Positive reception of Black PRAISE in general with the congregation utilizing some of the resources in church programming and discussion groups.

Church #6 (GTA)

The work done through Black PRAISE around HIV stigma within the church community helped shift dynamics within the space and allay anxieties for members entering the church with a lived experience. In particular, a person living with HIV was able to engage in conversations across generations and despite the challenge, allowing for knowledge building and the addressing of misconceptions. The church has become a welcoming place in particular for a person openly living with HIV.

COLLABORATING AGENCIES

Agency collaborators also reported a positive experience with Black PRAISE. The intervention allowed community agencies to network and build relationships with some faith institutions. These partnerships remained even when Black PRAISE ended, and continue to create ongoing information sharing on HIV.

However, some collaborators noted that some people were not prepared to reveal their sexuality and other issues on the survey questionnaire. Therefore, the dialogue created by Black PRAISE and It Takes Courage (ACCHO's faith-based stigma reduction program) to engage faith leaders needs to continue.

Following the report back, attendees began an open discussion about both the findings and the shared experiences from each of the church communities. Additional points included:

- Considering the number of people living with HIV disclosing their status within the church as an indicator of success for Black PRAISE
- The idea of addressing HIV-stigma through other related areas of stigma (e.g., sexual behaviour, sexuality, substance use, etc.)
- Having HIV-positive spokespersons help dispel misinformation about people living with HIV
- ASOs approaching stigma education work with a needed humility in order to meet faith communities where they are at, recognizing the challenge they face balancing this work with seemingly inflexible doctrine
- The importance of choosing to frame each movement forward in this work, however insignificant, as an important progress and not discounting actions

based on inappropriate comparisons to communities outside of the church

- The need to move beyond token spokespeople and representatives on this issue within the church, and instead move towards small team to ensure durability of actions beyond the present moment.
- Recognizing the difficulty in getting men within the church to engage in HIV and related programs, and identifying ways of outreaching to them.

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

The latter half of the afternoon was devoted to attendees brainstorming in small groups about the types of activities that they could undertake in moving forward some of the issues raised, and strengthening the learning acquired through Black PRAISE. Four clear activities emerged as commonalities from each of the tables. Their responses were captured as follows:

Program

- An interdenominational event that is open to the larger faith community, led by the 6 pilot churches, that centres dialogue about HIV stigma, sexuality, offers testing, and is open to all ages, in particular for youth.

Knowledge development

- The development of a workshop series that focuses on the social drivers that impact the Black community, integrating HIV education (stigma, testing etc.) into education around other health and wellness issues such as diabetes, and hypertension, and involving public health.

Knowledge development

(continued)

- Sharing this program and content with other churches to strengthen existing programs and inter-church relationships.
- Development of user-friendly resources to support learning and understanding about HIV stigma and related issues.

Informal discussions

- The creation of more informal opportunities to engage community leaders in having a conversation around these issues, across ages, and including people living with HIV
- Developing a talk-and-chat series hosted at a different church each month on specific days.

Committees

- The development of a small health promotion task force within each of the churches to implement health promotion (e.g., activities related to addressing HIV)
- Identifying avenues for funding that would enable congregants and community members to participate in community activities.



CLOSING REMARKS

The session ended with final remarks by Dr. Husbands thanking participants for their energy and enthusiasm throughout the day.

Dr. Husbands informed attendees that he would reach out to church representatives, research team members and affiliated agencies in the coming months to form a small committee that would be tasked with examining the feasibility of the suggested next steps, and prioritizing them. Following these activities, the small working committee and Dr. Husbands would reconvene with the larger group for a report back on the concrete action items to be moved forward in the next phase.

APPENDIX 1

Black PRAISE Conference Agenda

TIME/DURATION	ACTIVITY	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
12 noon - 12:10 (10 mins)	Welcome and Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastor Orville Browne • David Lewis-Peart
12:10 pm - 12:50 pm (40 mins)	LUNCH	
12:50 pm - 1:50 pm (60 mins)	Black PRAISE: Implementation and results (25 mins) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background & Development • Implementation • Results • Discussion (35 mins) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winston Husbands • All
1:50 pm - 2 pm (10 mins)	BREAK	
2 pm - 3 pm (60 mins)	Sharing our experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Churches • Collaborating Agencies <i>*Each church to have one individual share experience</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Lewis-Peart • 1 Rep from each church • 1 Rep from each agency
3 pm - 3:10 pm (10 mins)	BREAK	
3:10 pm - 4:10 pm (60 mins)	Small group discussion: Possible next steps or activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up activities: what might a program/project look like? Who would be involved? What resources would be needed? • Next steps, and how to continue engaging pastors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Lewis-Peart • All
4:10 pm - 4:25 pm (20 mins)	Planning and Prioritizing next steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When to involve in a time limited (3 month) task focused working group focused on timelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Lewis-Peart • All
4:25pm - 4:35pm (10 mins)	Wrap and Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Lewis-Peart • Winston Husbands

APPENDIX 2

Conference Evaluation Summary

The conference team conducted an online survey of conference attendees to get feedback about the Black PRAISE conference, and Black PRAISE in general. A total of 38 conference participants completed the survey. Of 33 conference participants who indicated their association or affiliation with Black PRAISE:

- 58% (19) were members of participating churches,
- 21% (7) were volunteers or worked for collaborating agencies,
- 3% (1) was a student, and
- 21% (7) helped the research team develop and/or implement Black PRAISE.

Some respondents were associated or affiliated with Black PRAISE in more than one way.

Regarding their experience of the Black PRAISE conference, all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that:

- the conference was well organized and well-planned;
- the conference materials were informative and helpful;
- Black PRAISE was a positive experience for the churches that participated;
- the presentation of the study findings helped them understand the impact of Black PRAISE; and
- the conference helped them appreciate Black PRAISE better than they did before.

Also, 76% found the small group discussions about possible next steps for Black PRAISE to be stimulating, and 94 % felt that meeting all the people who were connected to Black PRAISE was a very positive experience for them.

The team also asked conference participants to indicate how interested they were in participating in Black PRAISE's next steps or follow-up activities:

- 76% of the respondents indicated that they were "very interested" in participating in next steps or follow-up activities for Black PRAISE.

Conference participants also shared thoughts and experiences that they wrote in the space provided. Their responses touched on three issues: the need for Black PRAISE or similar projects to be implemented widely, the benefit or outcome of the conference, and the organizational aspect of the conference.

Some conference participants felt that Black PRAISE is a much needed intervention by the ACB community, and that it should be widely implemented throughout Canada. A respondent remarked:

"The Black PRAISE is what is needed in our community to combat HIV and its effect in our community. ACB community listen to and respect faith leaders. This should be used to propel future projects."

Another participant added:

"It was really heartening to hear the church's appreciation for the project."

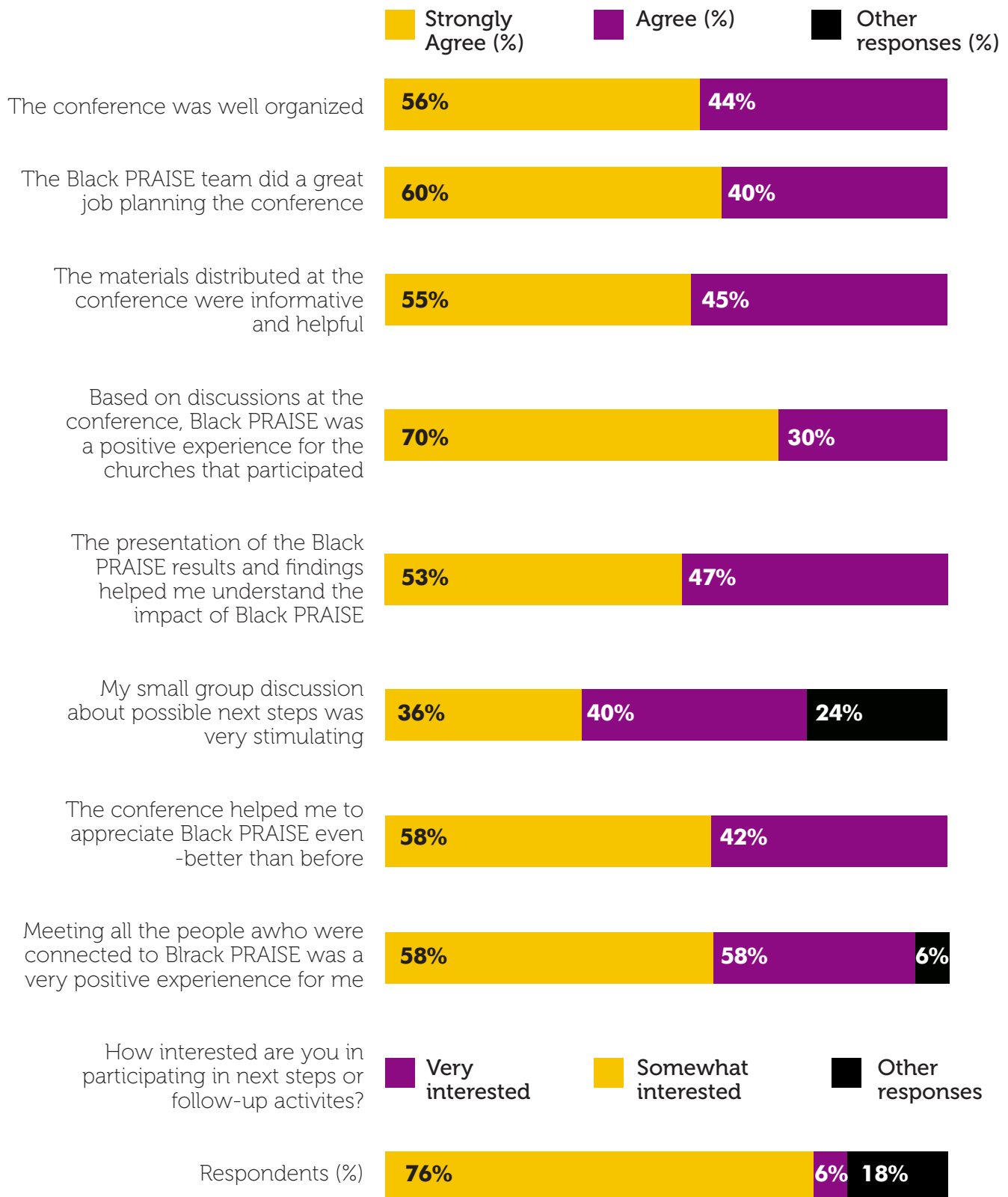
Conference participants also found the conference to be informative and educative. A respondent said:

"Gave a better understanding of efforts and anticipated results of Black PRAISE. Look forward to future activities that will impact the black community..."

Respondents also reported that the conference was well organized. One respondent remarked that the conference was:

"Very impressive, well organized and informative"

The summary of key feedback is as follows:





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